

Remembrance 2015

So this morning, whilst we gather to mark remembrance Sunday we are also continuing our series on prayer and we will be thinking about how prayer figures in the dark times, in the face of persecution, conflict and injustice.

We have had 2 passages read one from the Old Testament and one from the new – so what do these say to us today and what light do they shed on how we should respond to the brokenness of our world.

Isaiah, the prophet the messenger is bringing a harsh word to his people, just before the passage we had read today – he is telling them that the God who loved them, who brought them out of slavery is angry with them because of their rebellion and sin. Their nation Israel has been desolated (1:7), invaded by other nations and stripped of her assets. Isaiah has given them a message that what God's people say with their lips has to be backed up by how they live their lives – otherwise it is meaningless. He says that all their religious observances are worth nothing if their hearts are far from God, in fact they are an offense to God. He calls them to “wash and make yourselves clean...stop doing wrong” 1: 16 and to v17 seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

God offers them 2 paths in our reading – do what is right and it will go well for them or keep doing wrong and they will perish. Pretty stark choice – mm let me think about that! A place of prosperity, justice and honour or selfishness, injustice and rebellion I'll get back to you on that! Really?!

So the message we heard read in Isaiah is quite a shift of tone: God gives Isaiah a vision of how things will be in the last days.

The first thing I notice is the role of the church – I am not sure if we look around our world or nation that the church is necessarily so attractive that all nations will stream to her. Do you see that the church doesn't kajool people into coming, it is so attractive that they stream, the church is like a magnet.

Secondly I wonder how many of us here feel like we have quite a good handle on our faith, we've been Christians for a long time and don't need to learn anymore. Well the message here is remain teachable “He will teach us his ways so that we may walk in his path”. What path is that? Well in verse 5 we get the big message: the path of God is a path of light :

“Come let us walk in the light of the Lord”. But interestingly the passage is no longer referring to end times, that invitation is not a future one, the invitation is to each of us here today “Come, house of Jacob (Church of St. Mary's, Wavendon) let us walk in the light of the LordWhat does that mean or look like you might be asking.

Well walking in the light of the Lord means walking in obedience doesn't it. It means following the paths that Jesus trod, it is follow the leader – do what he did, go where he went, be like him. So for us the fact that the path is one of light – for those of us in a dark place, let us again welcome the light of Christ, his presence into our darkness, his hope into our despair – we do not have a God who is aloft and unable to empathise with our suffering, we have one who walked this earth, who died in agony, despised and rejected. He knows darkness. But he offers us light. Receive it.

We are also called to be bearers of the light of Christ (Matt 5:16), if we are walking in Christ's light where we go we take the light. So in a world of darkness we are Christ's light. So on this remembrance Sunday we are here to stand in Christ's light we are here to proclaim that darkness

cannot overcome the light. We are here to remember the damage, the pain of darkness in our world and to ask God to shine his light, his hope, his healing into the darkness. We are here to receive the commission again "Walk in the light of the Lord". Be light bearers for Christ.

So in the face of war, conflict and human suffering we are charged as Jesus's followers to bring light. How can we do that? I'd like to suggest a number of ways

- we may be able to offer financial support which will lighten the burden and ease some of the suffering and bring hope and light into despair and darkness
- maybe some of us are called to action, maybe we need to get a bit angry with the injustices around us and get fired up to make a difference
- maybe we are called to pray.

Our second passage in fact helps us with our response because it says that we are all to pray – it is quite funny the way it is written: petition, pray, intercede, thank God in verse 1– 4 words meaning the same thing PRAY! Whatever you want to call it is irrelevant - Just do it! PRAY. And who should we pray for and what should we pray. We should be praying for everyone verse 1. For rulers and those in authority, but also for the common man and woman. You may be thinking the Bible doesn't specify common people....it just lists important people. But you see it is not just rulers who determine whether we are able to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness verse 2 – it is also our next door neighbour, the people around us who can bless us or curse us! They can play loud music at night and chuck rubbish in our gardens or they can leave allotment produce and take our mail in whilst we are on holiday. We don't tend to get too many problems with our neighbours living next to a graveyard! But we should be praying for our neighbours. So we are called to pray for rulers and rabble. We are called to pray for those exercising authority justly but also for those abusing their authority as their actions too affect every citizen. Our prayers will obviously be very different! Do you notice too the repetition of the words all people:

God wants **all people** to be saved

Christ Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for **all people**

God's divine compassion is towards all, irrespective of race, status or condition. His compassion is costly too isn't it, it took his only Son Jesus to die on a cross as a ransom.

I wonder this morning as I close what price are we willing to pay to walk in the light of the Lord – for King & Country hundreds of thousands of men and women have given their lives and continue to risk their safety and freedoms for ours and we honour them today. But throughout history many many more have sacrificed comfort, dreams, a certain future, and their lives to honour our Lord Jesus, they chose to walk in the light of the Lord come what may, to honour Him who gave his life for all people of all time. What about us? Will we pray for our world, will we contribute our skills and talents to usher in God's peaceful kingdom? How much will we allow our futures to be shaped by the call to walk in the light of the Lord.

The passage tells us that one day God will come and judge, because he is a God of justice. All nations will stream to Him and there will be peace – in the meantime, let's be active in seeking peace in our own lives, through prayer and action, but also looking at the big picture of our broken world, let's not disengage, let's rise up and do all we can to support the peace-makers in our world and petition, pray, intercede and give thanks to the Prince of Peace, who is to come again. Amen